One Hundred Years Ago, On February 3, 1840, The Illinois Legislature Adjourned Its First Springfield Session. Abraham Lincoln Was A Member Of That Body.

The Second Presbyterian Church Where The Lower House Met.

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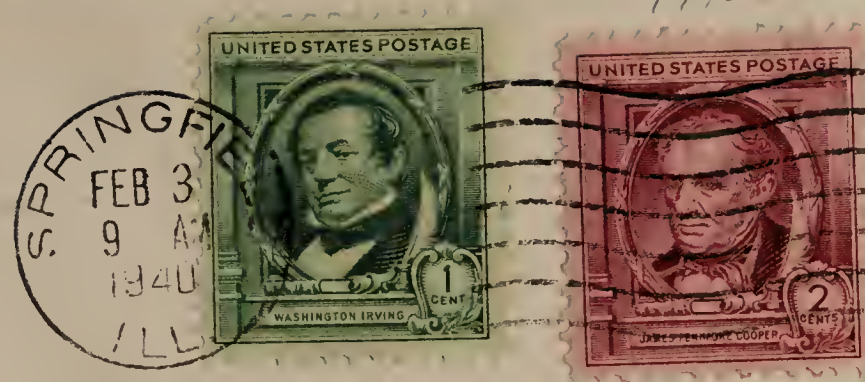

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Abraham Lincoln And The Illinois Legislature

February 3, 1840

HISTORICALLY speaking February 3, 1840, was a day long to be remembered in the chronicles of Springfield, for on that day the Eleventh Illinois General Assembly completed its second session, the first to be held in Springfield. Abraham Lincoln serving his third term as Representative from Sangamon County and also minority leader in the House of Representatives had a busy life indeed while the Legislature was in session.

The first Legislature held in Springfield was an important one and business of all kinds came under the watchful eyes of the delegates. Efforts were made to scrap the Internal Improvement program begun in 1837. This program was much more ambitious than the pioneer state of Illinois could comfortably handle and the panic of 1837, attended by the following years of depression made the tax pill a difficult one to swallow. Interest in the Internal Improvement program was at a low ebb, yet it is interesting to know that Abraham Lincoln supported measures to continue the improvements whenever opportunity presented itself. On January 4, he opposed several resolutions to suspend construction and on the 17th continued to oppose similar measures. The following week he was favorable toward the issuance of scrip for payment of labor on the Illinois and Michigan Canal.

Among the interesting resolutions that came before the body was one requiring all male inhabitants to work three days a year on the public roads. Divorces too, were within the scope of legislative powers in those days and some were issued during the session. Lincoln introduced and fathered through the legislature a bill to incorporate the City of Springfield. This duty came to him through his membership in the Springfield Town Council. The charter for the City of Springfield was granted on the last day of the session (February 3).

With the adjournment of the legislature Lincoln threw himself into the campaign, for this was the year of the historic Hard Cider Campaign. Edward D. Baker, his colleague in the legislature was also a member of the Whig State Central Committee with Lincoln, and during the year Lincoln was to assist or cross swords in debate with William Thomas, William Lee D. Ewing and Isaac P. Walker, all members of the legislature.

THEODORE S. CHARRNEY

The cachet symbolic of this event is a picture of the Second Presbyterian Church on Fourth Street between Adams and Monroe Street. It was here that the House of Representatives held their sessions during the first year that the capital was located at Springfield. The building no longer stands. Prepared by THE POOR RICHARD PRESS, 5053 Montana Street, Chicago, Illinois.

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